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Professional Reading: Amphibious Operations

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PROFESSIONAL READING

Amphibious Operations

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If one had to compare the Gallipoli and Inchon-Seoul amphibious campaigns in two words, the two words would have to be *failure* and *success*. These two books, *Gallipoli** and *Victory at High Tide*,** are a perfect pairing for a comparison of failed Gallipoli with successful Inchon. Rarely is military history written with such verve, style, and readability. Both authors were master storytellers with deep personal convictions.

The Anglo-French failure at Gallipoli in 1915 condemned the Allies to three more years of stalemated war on the western front, quite arguably made possible the success of the Bolsheviks in toppling Czarist Russia, and drove a lasting wedge of resentment between still-colonial (in thought, if not in form) Australia and New Zealand and the mother country, England. It also yielded the great "lesson" in European military thought that large-scale amphibious assaults could not succeed against a determined enemy holding well-fortified positions.

In 1950—despite the great amphibious successes of World War II, conventional military thought, numbed by the possible consequences of an atomic attack against the concentrations of men and shipping needed for a forcible entry from the sea—there was once again skepticism of the viability of

*Moorehead, Alan. *Gallipoli*. Annapolis: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company, 1982. 383pp. $16.95.

**Heinl, Robert Debs, Jr. *Victory at High Tide: The Inchon-Seoul Campaign*. Annapolis: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company, 1979. 315pp. $17.95.

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large-scale amphibious assault. Cross-grained to this conservative thinking was MacArthur's intuitive genius. Inchon literally "turned" the war. The North Korean main force that had squeezed the United Nations Command (at that point a euphemism for South Koreans and Americans) into the Pusan Perimeter, had to face about to confront a new enemy, proved incapable of doing so, and collapsed.

Moorehead, who died last year, was an Australian journalist who covered the Middle East and North Africa in World War II. He knew his theater exceedingly well as he demonstrated first with his *Mediterranean Front* (1941) and later with his beautifully written books of exploration, *The White Nile* (1960) and *The Blue Nile* (1962). *Gallipoli* was first published in 1956.

Above all else, Gallipoli was a failure of command. Moorehead writes sympathetically, even admiringly, but above all critically of General Sir Ian Hamilton, CinC of the Gallipoli expedition, who commanded from afloat or the offshore island of Imbros and who could scarcely bear to visit the battlefield.

The battles of Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes had cost the Russians a million men, and Czar Nicholas asked the British for a demonstration to relieve German pressure. War Minister Lord Kitchener wrote First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, on 2 January 1915, "The only place that a demonstration might have some effect in stopping reinforcements going east would be the Dardanelles." But Kitchener also said that if there was to be a demonstration it would have to be a naval affair. Sir John Fisher, First Sea Lord, wrote to Lloyd George, "Somebody will have to land at Gallipoli some time or other." General Ian Hamilton, Kitchener's chief of staff in the South African War, would command this new "Mediterranean Expeditionary Force."

On 19 February eight British and four French battleships steamed grandly into the straits and began a slow bombardment. Turkish reaction was feeble. By the end of the month landing parties of bluejackets and Marines were roaming "at will across the Trojan plain . . . . " It was optimistically assumed that the ships would get through to Constantinople by mid-March, but there were problems with mine clearance.

A new naval commander, Vice Admiral de Robeck took over and the naval attack resumed on 18 March. Fourteen British and four French battleships paraded into the straits. Four of them were knocked out. Hamilton had arrived in time to watch the attack from aboard ship. Next day he signaled Kitchener: "The Army's part will be more than mere landing parties to destroy forts; it must be a deliberate and prepared military operation, carried out at full strength, so as to open a passage for the Navy." He advised de Robeck that the army would be ready to land about the middle of April.

In Egypt, Hamilton had two divisions of Australians and New Zealanders, organized into the Anzac Corps under British Lieutenant General Sir

William Birdwood. He also had the British 29th Division, the Royal Naval Division, and a French North African division, altogether some 75,000 men. The main effort would be his best division, the 29th under Major General Sir Aylmer Hunter-Weston, landing over five small beaches at Cape Helles at the extreme tip of the peninsula. Birdwood and the Anzacs would land 13 miles up the coast at Gaba Tepe. The Royal Naval Division would feint a landing at Bulair and the French would land at Kum Kale on the Asiatic side of the straits. There was also a surprise stratagem. Some 2,000 men would be secreted in the collier *River Clyde*, which would be run aground at Cape Helles. The men would then charge down two ramps and across a bridge to the beach. All in all, it was an appallingly complicated plan, but de Robeck and his admirals were delighted. The bulk of the invasion force, some 200 ships, staged at the Greek-owned island of Lemnos, 700 miles from Egypt.

Hamilton watched the landings on 25 April from de Robeck's flagship, the 15-inch gun *Queen Elizabeth*, determined not to interfere with the conduct of the battle unless asked by his subordinate commanders. Hunter-Weston at Cape Helles and Birdwood at Gaba Tepe also remained at sea. Signaling arrangements broke down so that no senior officer had a clear picture as to what was happening ashore.

The Turks had turned over command of the Dardanelles to General Liman von Sanders. He had six divisions which he deployed as follows: two to the west and south of Troy, two at Bulair, one at Cape Helles, and the sixth in mobile reserve near Maidos on the Narrows—the last under Mustafa Kemal, future dictator of Turkey. Von Sanders was awakened at 5 a.m. with the news that the Allies had landed. Faced with a choice of five landings, he judged wrongly that Bulair must be the main attack and rode off to take personal command.

The Anzacs missed the Gaba Tepe beaches by a mile, but by 8 a.m. had 8,000 men ashore, some of them halfway up the slopes of dominating Chanuk Bair, where they were stopped by Mustafa Kemal. The *River Clyde* beached at Sedd-el-Bahr and discharged its soldiers into a curtain of Turkish rifle fire. The other four landings at Cape Helles went better but by noon Hunter-Weston had lost all three of his brigade commanders. Only the French at Kum Kale took their first day's objectives.

At midnight Hamilton was awakened by a message from Birdwood requesting permission to pull the Anzacs off the Gaba Tepe beach. Hamilton signaled back: " . . . there is nothing for it but to dig yourself right in and stick it out . . . . You have got through the difficult business, now you have only to dig, dig, dig, until you are safe." Dig they did and Australian soldiers have been "Diggers" ever since.

Von Sanders received two fresh divisions, giving him 75 battalions against Hamilton's 57. There followed a series of attacks and counterattacks for control of Achi Baba, the high ground above Cape Helles.

On 9 May de Robeck proposed a fresh effort to force the straits with his battleships. While this proposal was being debated in London, a Turkish destroyer torpedoed the battleship *Goliath*. Any further naval attack against the Narrows was forbidden. Churchill, who was for the reinforcement of Hamilton, and Fisher, who was against it, came to an open break. Fisher resigned, precipitating a cabinet crisis. When a new cabinet was formed on 26 May, Churchill was out of the Admiralty.

The Turks attacked the Anzac beachhead with four divisions on 18 March and lost 10,000 men in half a day's fighting. After a truce to bury the dead, the fighting shifted south again to Cape Helles where in June and July there were five attacks "so ant-like and inconclusive that it is almost impossible to discover any meaning in them . . . . "

In London it was decided that there must be another landing. Suvla Bay, five miles above the Anzacs, was picked as the objective area. Five fresh divisions were staged in the Aegean islands. Squat ugly monitors mounting 14-inch guns came out to replace the battleships. There were also the Beetles, great landing barges with long landing ramps, capable of carrying 500 men. The landing was to be coordinated with attacks by Hunter-Weston's corps at Cape Helles and Birdwood's Anzacs. Sir Frederick Stopford, in retirement since 1909, would command at Suvla Bay.

Von Sanders had fairly good intelligence that a major attack was coming, but he did not expect it at Suvla Bay. His 16 divisions matched Hamilton's 13 larger divisions, but at Suvla Bay he had only three battalions, no machine guns and no barbed wire, under a Major Willmer of the Bavarian cavalry.

The British got two divisions ashore, something like 20,000 men, in a night landing on 6 August against almost no resistance. Major Willmer harassed them all the next day, causing 1,600 casualties. No guns came ashore that day, only about 50 mules and almost no water. Neither Hamilton at Imbros nor Stopford on board the sloop *Jonquil* knew what was happening. Hamilton finally went ashore the evening of 8 August and over Stopford's complacent head ordered an immediate advance.

On the other side, von Sanders was having problems of his own getting a counterattack organized. His solution was to shift Kemal from the Anzac front, where there had been two days of heavy fighting. At sunrise on the 9th the Turks came over the ridge in a tumultuous charge, driving the British back to the sea. Kemal then faced around to fight again on the Anzac front. By midday on 10 August the British were pocketed at Suvla Bay, Gaba Tepe, and Cape Helles, with all commanding ground in the hands of the Turks.

Hamilton told Kitchener that he needed another 95,000 men. The French promised four more divisions and the British two. Then Bulgaria came into the war. London decided that a choice had to be made between Gallipoli and Salonika. On 11 October Kitchener asked Hamilton for his estimate of losses if it were decided to evacuate the Gallipoli peninsula. The Dardanelles

Committee met on 14 October, considered Hamilton's estimate that his losses might be 50 percent, and decided that Hamilton must go. General Sir Charles Monro was to succeed him. Hamilton left on the 18th; Monro arrived on the 28th. In six hours he had visited, by destroyer, the three beachheads. British guns were down to two shells a day. Next day he recommended to Kitchener the evacuation of the peninsula.

Kitchener came out himself in mid-November. On 22 November he cabled London recommending giving up Suvla and Anzac, but holding Cape Helles for the time being. There were some 83,000 men at Suvla and Anzac. Twelve thousand hospital beds were got ready in Egypt. The evacuation began on 12 December—in increments, by night, all tents left in position, all guns continuing their regular ration of shelling. By 18 December, 40,000 men had been taken off. The remainder went off in the next two nights. Von Sanders later admitted that not until 20 December did he know what was taking place. But now he had 21 divisions with which to march south against Cape Helles. Monro recommended that Cape Helles be given up and on 27 December London agreed. The 35,000 men in the beachhead began leaving on 1 January 1916. The Turks attempted to break the line on 7 January and failed. The rest of the British came off the night of 8 January. The last rallying point was the *River Clyde*, still firmly aground.

There was a curious symmetry to the casualties of the eight-month campaign: each side had had about a half-million men engaged and each had lost a quarter-million.

That ends Alan Moorehead's story of the failure at Gallipoli. He gets some small facts wrong. For example, he calls Liman von Sanders a "field marshal," which he never was, and he says that von Sanders had six divisions initially in his Fifth Army whereas von Sanders, who ought to know, says that he had five (Liman von Sanders, General of Cavalry, *Five Years in Turkey*). But this is carping. Royal Navy Captain Eric Wheler Bush's more recent (1975) *Gallipoli* may be a bit more accurate and has the additional fillip that Bush was a 15-year-old midshipman and boat officer serving in the cruiser *Bacchante* during the operation. But no account comes up to Moorehead's in style, and that includes John Masefield's *Gallipoli*, which was largely a wartime (1916) propaganda effort, and Ian Hamilton's own firsthand but prolix *Gallipoli Diary* published in 1920.

Colonel Heinl's *Victory at High Tide*, published first in 1968, does not begin where Moorehead's *Gallipoli* leaves off, but a link between the failure at Gallipoli and the success at Inchon, although unstated, is easily traced.

In early 1918, Marine Lieutenant Colonel Robert H. Dunlap was serving on Admiral Sims' staff in London. In May, Sims sent Dunlap (a member of the Naval War College staff from 1910 until 1912) to Rome to assist in the planning of an amphibious operation in the Adriatic involving a division-size US Marine expeditionary force. The Allied Naval Council shelved the plan,

but Dunlap continued to ponder the possibilities of amphibious operations. After the war he analyzed Gallipoli and isolated the problems that would have to be solved if modern landing operations were to be successful. In 1927, while commanding officer of Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, he recommended that a "War Planning Course" be established "to influence naval thought in connection with war plans." The first term was to commence in September 1929. In 1930, Dunlap was promoted to brigadier general and sent to Paris to study at the Ecole Superieure de Guerre. The following spring he was killed saving a woman's life in a cave-in. But the seed had been sown.

In 1931 at Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, a committee of three Marine majors and a Navy lieutenant drafted a manual, *Marine Corps Landing Operations*. It was never published but it provided a starting point the following year when classes were suspended and all hands, staff and students, put to the business of analyzing the Gallipoli campaign. In 1933 classes were again suspended to produce "rules and doctrine covering landing operations." The result was the *Tentative Doctrine for Landing Operations* which dealt with such fundamentals as amphibious command relations, ship-to-shore movement and communications, air and naval gunfire support, embarkation and combat loading, and shore party organization, all things that had gone wrong at Gallipoli. In 1938 a more polished version was published as *Landing Operations Doctrine, U.S. Navy (FTP 167)*. In 1941 the Army put the same document between khaki covers as FM 31-5, *Landing Operations on Hostile Shores*. Thus it was that we went into World War II with a viable amphibious doctrine tested by a series of fleet landing exercises. This doctrine was successfully used both in the European and Pacific theaters and eventually was accepted by all Allied forces.

After World War II amphibious assaults against fortified beaches were again written off by many military experts as a nuclear age improbability. General Omar Bradley, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, gave his opinion to the House Armed Services Committee that there would never again be a major amphibious assault. General Eisenhower stated that it was unnecessary to have any Marine unit larger in size than a regiment. Truman-imposed reductions executed by Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson brought the Corps down to 74,279 officers and men when the North Koreans crossed the 38th Parallel on 25 June 1950, barely enough to man a half-size division and an equally weak aircraft wing on each coast.

In Tokyo, in a 10 July meeting with Lieutenant General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., CG of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, General MacArthur moved to a wall map and stabbed at the port of Inchon with the stem of his corncob pipe: "If I only had the 1st Marine Division under my command again, I would land them here . . . . " But the understrength 1st Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, California, had been gutted to provide a single-regiment

1st Provisional Marine Brigade for emergency deployment to the Pusan Perimeter.

In his *Reminiscences,* MacArthur says, "The target date, because of the great tides at Inchon, had to be in the middle of September. This meant that the staging for the landing at Inchon would have to be accomplished more rapidly than that of any other large amphibious operation in modern warfare . . . . My plan was opposed by powerful military influences in Washington."

Joint Task Force Seven, altogether some 230 ships, was activated under Vice Admiral Arthur D. Struble late in August. Task Force 90, the attack force, was under amphibious expert Rear Admiral James H. Doyle. Much of the Navy's amphibious shipping was a rusty travesty of the great World War II amphibious armadas. Many of the LSTs used for the landing had to be recalled from Japanese charters. Some came complete with Japanese crews. The rest were manned by naval reserves flown out from the States.

Task Force 92, expeditionary troops, was X Corps, activated on 26 August and command given, not to Shepherd as expected by the Marines but to Major General Edward M. Almond, who had been MacArthur's chief of staff. In addition to the 1st Marine Division as the landing force, Almond had, in reserve, the half-strength 7th Infantry Division, its ranks filled out with freshly conscripted South Koreans.

To put the 1st Marine Division on a war footing, the East Coast 2d Marine Division had to be stripped of most of its undersized battalions and these filled up with reserves and casuals from posts and stations. Even so, there were only two infantry regiments present to make the landing: the 5th Marines, which had to be withdrawn from the Pusan Perimeter, and the 1st Marines, put together from bits and pieces at Camp Pendleton not much more than a month before. The 1st Korean Marine Corps Regiment was assigned to the division on 3 September.

Compression of the schedule dictated by the landing date ruled out a rehearsal and many of the other niceties of amphibious preparation. The approaches to Inchon were a hydrographer's nightmare. There was a tortuous, obstructed channel, but even more of a problem were the tides, projected to be an incredible 31.2 feet on D-day, 15 September 1950. When the tide went out it ripped through the channel at seven or eight knots, leaving vast mud flats over which amphibian tractors could not expect to crawl. The hydrographers said that the morning high tide would be at 0659, evening high tide at 1919. The landing would have to accommodate to these.

First phase was the morning landing of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, to take Wolmi-Do Island, L-hour 0630. Second phase was the evening landing, H-hour 1730, of the rest of the 5th Marines across Red Beach to the north, and of the 1st Marines across Blue Beach to the south. They weren't really "beaches"; they were seawalls and the Marines went over them with scaling ladders.

The Marines got ashore, fought their way inland along the axis of the Inchon-Seoul Highway, and ended the campaign with the recapture of Seoul. The 7th Marines joined the division in the city.

General Almond dismissed the landing itself as "a purely mechanical operation." Major General Oliver P. Smith, CG, 1st Marine Division, disagreed: "The reason it looked simple was that professionals did it."

Colonel Bob Heinl, who wrote *Victory at High Tide*, died in 1979 during a sailing cruise in the Caribbean. Like Alan Moorehead, he was a journalist-historian. Moreover, he was a career Marine, seagoing before World War II and a naval gunfire expert during the war. He missed the Inchon landing but served in Korea in 1952-53 as defense commander of the East Coast islands. After retirement in 1964 he went on to a second career as military correspondent for the *Detroit News*. His out-of-print *Soldiers of the Sea* (1962), unabashedly partisan, is the most readable of Marine Corps one-volume histories. Both his *Victory at High Tide* and Moorehead's *Gallipoli*, in their present editions, form part of Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company's distinguished Great War Stories series.

As the news spread in Hagaru that the 5th and 7th Marines had finally fought through, many hurried to the roadblock to watch the arrival. Naval Lieutenant (jg) Robert Harvey, who had served as battalion surgeon for Taplett throughout the southern campaign, went to meet his old friends as they came into the perimeter. He found several hundred Marines already waiting. They saw the point come into view and the snake-line of following trucks. Six hundred yards from the perimeter entrance the point halted and the trucks ground to a stop. Those of the wounded and frostbitten who could walk crawled from the vehicles and formed on the bleak, frozen road. There, in silence, they began to march; with no word or count the cadence was picked up and the Marines at the perimeter entrance heard the frozen Shoepacs on the frozen road pounding in rhythm.

The Marines of Hagaru watched the Marines of Yudam-ni march toward them, march by them—haggard, bearded and hard. The men of the 5th and 7th received their tribute from the tears in the eyes of the Marines awaiting them. Overcome by the sight of the depleted ranks, Harvey wept with the others. He whispered over and over, "Look at those bastards, those magnificent bastards—"

Don Childs
The Chosen Few Winter 1984-85